

MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS IN B.C. (Continued)

expressed either in dollars or merely in units, and the only basis for complaint by the taxpayer should be that his assessment is inequitable by comparison with other properties. If necessary, the municipal department of the Government would approve of the unit basis.

The present system and the Minister's proposed system merely open the way for endless litigation which can be avoided by the exercise of a little common sense. The Government's proposal, expressed in the Minister's speech, that improvements should be taxed, is but following out its method of raising revenue where it is easiest to get it. The man with a home cannot move it out of the province—the man with large investments in the shape of bonds and stocks can leave overnight. If the Government, instead of making proposals such as this, would make it easier for a man to own a home, a great deal of unrest would be avoided, as it is the man who owns no property who creates most trouble. Bolshevism could hardly exist where every citizen owned his own home, and every citizen should be encouraged to do so.

A further suggestion of the Government is that more control should be exercised over the municipalities, through a Board to consist of three experts, a financial man, a legal man and an engineer. If the financial expert was any good he would not work for what the Government would pay him; an engineer is not required and a lawyer is not the best man to have for a position such as this.

If such a Board existed, it should consist of three men possessing intelligence, or rather good horse sense and an up-to-date knowledge of municipal affairs. Such men could get any necessary legal and engineering services from those at present employed by the Government. Experience of such boards in this Province has shown us that there is a tendency on the part of the Government to employ exclusively, defeated candidates and party heelers. Such boards, when they wish to buy a barrow-full of gravel, purchase a steam shovel in order to save the dealers profit. They do things which no municipal council has yet been accused of doing.

A department of municipal affairs would undoubtedly be better, provided the Government would keep politics out of the matter. Any assistance required in this department could be recruited from the municipalities whose affairs are in excellent condition, but possibly the men running these municipalities are unknown to the political machine.

It was, undoubtedly, a good political stroke of business to shoulder the unpopular personal tax on to the municipalities and to make it optional, thus making it an issue at every municipal election. The Minister of Finance admits that the Government was never entitled to this tax. I would suggest that the Government turn over to the municipalities, now, the amount which it has collected from this tax for the past ten years. In the present budget, the Government takes an additional \$375,000.00 from motor licenses, \$50,000.00 from insurance tax, \$250,000.00 from the Pari Mutuel machines, \$50,000.00 additional from amusement tax, and \$150,000.00 additional from the Dominion owing to the increased population in the Province.

Practically the whole of this comes from the inhabitants of the municipalities, so that the Gov-

ernment is giving away its most unpopular tax and taking over amounts which fully make up for the loss.

The Minister of Finance admits that the present relationship between the school boards and councils is unsound and that there ought to be a different method of governing the schools. He is also of the opinion that the cost of schools is not a fair tax on the land, more especially as it is the Government, through its education department, which lays down what the expenditures of schools must be. In spite of this, the budget ignores this phase of the situation.

It may have been a good political move to give the municipalities half the liquor profits and to earmark it for schools and hospitals, as it puts prohibitionists in a position that if they fight to abolish liquor they will have to pay more taxes for the education of their children.

I do not believe that the present Minister of Finance is at all enthusiastic about his budget—it is a caucus budget and satisfactory to no one. If half the recommendations are put into force, the condition of the people will be worse than before, though possibly a few friends of the Government will be relieved of financial anxiety through the creation of positions for them, which they are not competent to fill.

The Union of B.C. Municipalities will continue the struggle against an unjust state of affairs. The Union admits that errors have been made in municipal management and welcomes the pointing out of these errors, but they see nothing in the proposals of the Government which will help to put these matters right.

COURTS ENFORCING FOREST PROTECTION

Jail sentences and heavy fines for causing forest fires are now being applied more frequently by Canadian courts. For the first time on record, an Ontario settler was sent to prison recently for defying the law regarding the taking of precautions before clearing land with fire. His carelessness caused a loss of millions of feet of timber. Five New Brunswick sportsmen were fined fifty dollars each for leaving their campfire burning, causing thereby a serious timber conflagration. Heavy fines and jail sentences are also the rule with many Quebec magistrates, who are determined to stamp out the prevalent carelessness of the public in regard to forest destruction.

Not many years ago, an Eastern Canada farmer set fire to his debris to clear a new patch for potato planting and as a direct result burned down enough white pine to have kept the largest Canadian lumber plant supplied for 56 years.

The way to make Fire Prevention Week accomplish something worth while and lasting is to make it mark the end of firetrap construction. Build so it Won't Burn.

The surest way of preventing fire tragedies is building structures that won't burn. That should be the big lesson of Fire Prevention Week in your community.

A fire-safe town keeps the fire loss down.